

## **INS COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCES COMMITMENT TO SWEEPING CHANGES IN CHICAGO DISTRICT OFFICE**

**CHICAGO - U.S. Sens. Dick Durbin and Peter Fitzgerald, and U.S. Reps, Jan Schakowsky and Luis Gutierrez announced today they have received a letter from Commissioner Doris Meissner detailing the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) commitment to sweeping changes at the INS's Chicago District Office. The commitment comes after months of pressure asking the INS to respond to complaints of poor customer service at the local facility.**

**Meissner said the INS is developing a strategy, with input from the Illinois congressional delegation, to "avoid long delays," "minimize long lines," and "improve the comfort of those waiting for INS service." To ensure appropriate action is taken at the Chicago District Office, the commissioner said she will personally visit Chicago in the next two months to brief officials on the INS' progress.**

**"I welcome the involvement of Commissioner Meissner in efforts to reform customer service at the INS' Chicago District Office," Durbin said. "But we cannot declare victory before we see steady advances in service. The promised improvements will be closely monitored by the entire congressional delegation."**

**"I look forward to working with Commissioner Meissner to ensure that Illinoisans are better served by the INS," Fitzgerald said.**

**"The bottom line is that the Chicago INS office must treat our immigrant residents with the respect and efficiency they deserve," Schakowsky said. "Though long overdue, the recognition of the problem by top management is welcome. My office will have frequent observers there to assure that there is a change."**

**"I am hopeful that these changes will be part of a comprehensive effort by the INS to address the needs of people who require, deserve and pay for the services the agency is charged with fulfilling," said Gutierrez, who chairs the Congressional Hispanic Caucus' Task Force on Immigration. "These improvements - if coupled with additional reforms, including substantial reductions in the massive backlog facing applicants for citizenship and other forms of adjustment of status - would demonstrate that the INS has begun to recognize the importance of carrying out its service-oriented functions in addition to its enforcement duties."**

**Promising to improve the quality of staff service at every level of the IND, Meissner acknowledged the current system to review complaints "is not enough." Therefore, the Chicago District Office will begin to provide cultural diversity/sensitivity training to employees this fall. In addition to these local efforts, INS Headquarters is working with private consultants to expand and revise customer service guidelines for INS staff.**

**The INS also announced the Chicago District Office will start construction next month on a project to create more space to accommodate applicants with appointments, and consolidate service to walk-in customers. The construction project is scheduled to be completed in April 2000.**

**Meissner's commitment comes after the INS finished a comprehensive management review (called INSpect) of the Chicago District Office on July 30. Under the direction of the INS Headquarters Office of Internal Audit, INSpect review team composed of more than 20 specialists evaluated every aspect of operation in the Chicago office. The INS will release the results of the review in the near future.**